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Pastor takes aid to the neediest

By Michel Nolan
Staff Writer

The Rev. David Kalke has seen the violence and heard the cries for help.

As pastor of San Bernardino's Central City Lutheran Mission, he is passionate about serving the city's neediest residents.

He's encouraged by public dialogue but realistic about the city's progress so far in addressing poverty as the underlying cause of violence.

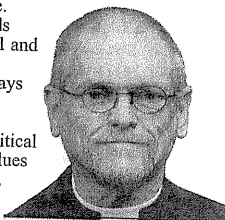
He believes San Bernardino needs programs that are community-based and that train leaders from among our youths to look for more creative ways to stay alive, stay in school and become more educated.

"Once people start to do some critical thinking, they begin to establish values that reflect tolerance for each other, for other cultures," says Kalke, 58, who has spent 32 years in urban ministry — 21 in New York City and 11 in San Bernardino.

"Once those values are established, violence starts to go down," he says.

Soft-spoken and direct, Kalke takes inner-city kids out of destructive environments and puts them in a position where they can succeed.

"Our most recent initiative is to work with 12 teenagers we call the Youth Peacekeepers," Kalke says. "Their task is to become more educated in the areas of nonviolence and nonviolence intervention and to be more active in our neighborhood, helping to create peace between African-American and Latin American youth, which we know is an increasing problem in



David Kalke,
pastor of Central
City Lutheran
Mission in San
Bernardino



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our schools and our area.

According to Kalke, "We're really working toward developing cultural competency within our program so our young people can appreciate each other's cultures and find some nonviolent ways to work through some difficult issues."

From his perspective as a faith-based community leader, Kalke offers these insights:

Question: Since beginning your work in the central portion of San Bernardino, you've made observations on the "walk-through" syndrome. Have you seen any change, any more willingness to serve the needs of the community there?

Answer: I think there's been some significant changes in the last year where organizations are more willing to actually come into our neighborhood and do work. We've seen some efforts from civic organizations and other church organizations — even Cal State San Bernardino, through their community-based partnership program — to bring peo-

ple into the neighborhood to work with us in terms of landscaping or being part of serving meals or working with our homeless population in terms of winter shelter.

I think we're still experiencing a bit of a distance from some of our social-service agencies. We don't find a lot of workers willing to come into our neighborhoods — particularly after 5 p.m. It's still seen as a dangerous area, so it's difficult to establish evening programs and difficult to establish programs with professionals who might be able to bring the services into our neighborhoods rather than expecting our residents to go to service sites. Transportation being a difficult problem in our city and many of our people not having cars, it's really important to get our social-service agencies as close to the people as possible. That's still a challenge for us.

Q: Could you tell us about some of the programs offered by the Central City Lutheran Mission?

A: Our mission is a multiservice community development project that focuses on the

areas of housing, education and health. ... It's basically taking HIV-positive people off the streets and putting them into a continuum of care that provides them counseling and support group systems but also a home to live.

We're the only agency in the city that offers winter shelter for men. During these cold nights, we've been averaging 65-70 people. They literally come in and sleep in our sanctuary — on the pews, on the floor. A number of agencies in the area help provide blankets and hygiene kits.

In education, we do a lot with young people. We do have some adult education programs — we offer English as a Second Language, computer classes, sewing classes. But our main emphasis is working with youth. Since 1996, we had the first after-school program for children 5-12 in our city and still have the only five-day-a-week program for teenagers.

Q: What is your goal in this urban ministry?

A: We have two goals: One is to be able to establish in the central-city area a community

development project that provides a better opportunity for people who are living below the federal poverty level. The second goal is to interface with city agencies and demonstrate there are other ways to make things happen — using our programs as a pilot project so that other agencies can be supportive.

Q: Are we any closer to addressing the social issues that lead to increased violence?

A: One wants to be optimistic, but realistically speaking, within the city of San Bernardino, we're probably not any closer than we were a couple years ago. There's been a lot of public conversation about issues that cause violence, but as far as policy changes, we haven't seen any significant changes that address poverty as the underlying cause of violence in our city. We've got to think more creatively and aggressively about the social issues that lead to violence.

■ For more information about the Central City Lutheran Mission, call (909) 381-6921.

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